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שניאור זלמן ע"ה
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רחל שיחיו
סערעבריאנסקי



“Is He Working On His Inventions?”

The following story is one of many from the lifelong relationship of Rabbi Dr. Naftali Berg with the Rebbe, as told by his daughter, Rivka Reintez.

Written By:

Rabbi Shabi Soffer and Rabbi Tzemach Feller

My father was raised in a traditional Jewish home in Chicago. He discovered Chassidus at a young age and began developing a close connection to the Rebbe; a connection which would last throughout his entire life. He was gifted with a brilliant mind and eventually became an awarded and world-renowned scientist working for the United States government, specifically the Defense Department, as a frum, hat and jacket wearing Lubavitcher Chossid in Washington, DC. He would receive constant encouragement from the Rebbe because of what he would be able to achieve for the Jewish people and the safety of Eretz Yisroel.

Once, when a private job—one that came with a significant pay raise—was offered to him, the Rebbe told him, “Let them see in Washington that a frum Jew can rise this high and do this well.”

Most of his research and work was—and still remains—highly confidential. I can share that some of his work was in the development of a number of advanced fighter jets and the Patriot missile defense system. While helping develop these defense technologies, he showed up each day in the office dressing—and acting—proudly like a Chosid, with a Tanya

in his pocket and Rambam in his hand.

When I was a young child, my father was diagnosed with leukemia. Despite aggressive treatment, he eventually reached the point where the doctors informed him that his life expectancy was six months. Around the time that we received this terrible prognosis, my parents and I went to the Rebbe at Sunday dollars for my 17th birthday, on 2 Nissan 5751*.

My father informed the Rebbe of a special procedure they would be trying in the coming weeks, and requested a *bracha* that it should be successful. The Rebbe gave a *bracha* for a successful and speedy recovery, and immediately reminded him that he is currently in the middle of writing a book, and wished him continued success in his endeavors and that he should earn awards for his work.

Afterwards, the Rebbe gave me a dollar and a *bracha* for my birthday, then suddenly he called my mother back and said “this is for the wedding, at an auspicious hour” which was quite odd considering that it was my 17th birthday, and I had no plans to get married. My father privately wondered if the fact that the Rebbe called only my mother back to give this unusual *bracha* meant that he wouldn’t live to see my

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wedding day.

As my father’s sickness progressed, his spleen swelled up—a side effect of leukemia—and the doctors determined that it had to be removed, and noted that it had grown so large that it was the second largest ever recorded globally. In his weakened state, my father would be lucky to survive the surgery, the doctors informed him bluntly.

My sister went to the Rebbe during Sunday dollars and requested the Rebbe’s *bracha*. Interestingly, the Rebbe replied using the same word the doctor used: a *bracha* that it will be with good luck, and he repeated this a few times in the few languages that my sister knew, including French.

After this encounter and the Rebbe’s go-ahead for the surgery, my father’s condition worsened and he had to be rushed to the ICU, on life-support in an induced coma. In the state in which they would perform the operation on him, the doctors didn’t think he would survive.

On Pesach Sheni I went to the Rebbe again to ask for a *bracha* for my father’s recovery, using his first name and his mother’s name.

The Rebbe gave me a dollar and quickly responded, “Professor Berg? Give this to tzedakah for him. May he have a speedy recovery, and success in his inventions.”

Then suddenly the Rebbe asked me, “Is he working on his inventions?” almost as if the Rebbe hadn’t known about the severity of the situation.

To this I replied no, and I told the Rebbe that he was currently in the hospital in intensive care.

The Rebbe then asked, “But before that he was working on his inventions? He probably left in the middle of things.”

I told the Rebbe that my father’s staff were continuing their work on his projects.

Then, with a beautiful smile from ear to ear, the Rebbe looked right at me and told me to remind my father that he must make his recovery as soon as possible to return to and continue his work, and the Rebbe gave us *brachos* for *bsuros tovos*—good news.

At that time, my father was unconscious, undergoing a complex and risky operation with little chance for survival, and yet the Rebbe’s reaction to the whole situation was almost as if there was nothing to worry about, he’ll be back to work in no time, and he wanted me to give him that message. All of this, together with the warm smile the Rebbe gave me while saying it, put me at ease and gave me hope.

Amazingly, that’s exactly how it happened. To the surprise of the doctors and surgeons he successfully made it through the operation and was soon on the path to recovery.

Not long after, my father was out of the hospital in Maryland and on his feet. Of course, he returned to Sunday dollars at 770, on 15 Elul. I joined him on this trip as he went to thank the Rebbe for all the *brachos* and his continued care and involvement for us and our situation.



RABBI DR. NAFTALI BERG WITH MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES DEFENSE DEPARTMENT



RABBI DR. NAFTALI BERG PRESENTS THE REBBE WITH AN EARLY EDITION OF THE TANYA AT 'SUNDAY DOLLARS', 15 ELUL 5751.

Especially after this story's miraculous outcome, my father wanted to show his appreciation to the Rebbe in a unique way, so he decided to gift the Rebbe an early edition of the Tanya which he had in his possession.

The Rebbe, holding the Tanya, reminded my father that they had recently discussed my father's work on writing and publishing an upcoming book. (In this full-circle moment, the discussion the Rebbe was referring to was the one that took place at that very first Sunday dollars encounter of this story, just a few months prior, on 2 Nissan, that the Rebbe initiated immediately after giving a *bracha* for a speedy recovery.) The Rebbe then asked with a big smile if my father could follow up his current work in progress with a book like the Tanya he had just handed to the Rebbe. My father smiled, gesturing humbly with his hands, and the Rebbe gave a *bracha* for Hashem's help and said, "*Yagata U'matzasa* — Toil and you will find [success]."

Right before we left, the Rebbe summoned my father back, and again asked about the inventions that my father had been working on, to which my father replied, again gesturing with his hands, that with G-d's help, hopefully it will be ready soon, since they were in the middle of working on it. The Rebbe replied with a smile, "All this must be in the future? Why gesture doubtfully with your hands; better use your hands to accomplish good things!"

Just like in the previous time, the Rebbe focused the

discussion on where his work was holding, encouraging him to continue where he left off and increase in his efforts.

In fact, all the way back to that very first encounter, what may have seemed like the Rebbe changing the subject from the severity of the situation to my father's work endeavors, was actually the Rebbe showing us that my father's mission in this world was not yet complete, and there was nothing to worry about.

Thank G-d my father outlived the initial estimated life expectancy of 6 months by a few years.

As for the mysterious dollar my mother received for "the wedding" and my father's concerns, he did in fact live to see my wedding day, and passed away a few months later.

To top it all off, 26 years later I was marrying off my daughter when my brother-in-law approached me at the wedding and asked whether anyone had the dollar. I wasn't sure what he was referring to. He said, "You know? The dollar for the wedding the Rebbe gave on this date in 5751*."

I then realized that the date of my daughter's wedding was the exact same date on which the Rebbe gave my mother, on my 17th birthday, a dollar "for the wedding". Now, here I was with that same dollar at my daughter's wedding, and *baruch Hashem*, my mother, may she live and be well, was present at the wedding as well.

Only then did we begin to understand what the Rebbe meant. ❶